



## **Roses Are Red, Woe is You** by **everybreatheeverymove**

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**Summary:** (Standalone oneshot.) Florist AU: For nine days straight, he comes into the store. And every time, he leaves with just one rose and another piece of her heart. On the tenth day, she understands why.

## Roses Are Red, Woe is You

On the first day, she doesn't really pay him much mind.

He walks into the store with his hands in his pockets as though he'd rather be anywhere else, but his head is held high as though he's a naturally confident person who's just a little anxious.

"Hi." She greets him from over the counter, "What can I help you with?"

"Hi." He steps up to the counter with a lick of his lips, a breath, "Do you do single flowers?"

(Okay, so she's not the manager and Kali likes it when they sell *by the bouquet*... but she'll make an exception.)

El shrugs, and she waves a hand about, "Yeah, I can do that." She pulls at the strings on the back of her apron, tightening them up, "Which one are you after?"

"I, umm," he starts, catching her eye, "I have no idea, really. What would *you* pick?"

"Well, I don't know. I mean, it depends on who or what you're buying it for."

"A girl."

"Ah." El gulps, and she whips back around so she doesn't have to face him directly, suddenly feeling out of her comfort zone. Usually, when she's on shift, people just come in and ask for special arrangements or ready-made bouquets. Nobody ever unintentionally taunts her with the reminder that *she's* never actually been bought flowers.

(And, okay, this is only one but...)

"Roses are nice."

"I guess a rose, then." He says, and there's a calmness to his voice that actually oddly comforts her.

(Maybe someday someone will...)

El picks one of the freshest roses from the pot, and she inspects it carefully, "Red?"

"Sure."

That's the extent of their conversation, aside from her ringing him up.

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### **On the second day, she actually looks at him.**

Sure, she sizes him up. She watches as he enters the store, looking like a tech nerd in the middle of Claire's — wide-eyed as though he's *clueless*, chewing at his bottom lip as though he's *nervous*.

He comes in, dark green parka fitting perfectly over his sweater — a stripy Christmas knit with cartoonish reindeer antlers decorating the chest. It's early February, so it's still kind of chilly outside and she can't blame him for wanting to stay warm. His black jeans are held up by a belt she thinks could do with a tightening, and his socks are stuffed into black Converse that are almost *too* clean.

His black hair's a total mess, she thinks with a tilt of her head, a narrowing of her eyes. It's like he'd brushed it into a floppy, *boyish* style, before the cold weather and strong winds had worked in his disfavor.

She'd slid her arms across the counter as he approached, clasping her hands together over the edge as he took (what she can only classify as) baby-steps in her direction.

Truthfully, she doesn't remember much about him from yesterday. But she knows it's the same guy because his voice has that same soft, husky tone to it.

"Hi."

Stopping in front of her, he slides a hand into his back pocket to retrieve his wallet.

El looks up at his face then, blinking. She smiles, arching her back

out as she eyes him considerably.

(Okay, so she doesn't have much experience in the so-called 'boy department', but he's *cute*.)

"Hi." She smiles, batting her lashes.

His Adam's apple bobs, and he nods his head in direction of the flowers displayed behind her. "One rose," he clears his throat, "please?"

El pushes back from the counter then, and she smooths her hands down her apron, palms flat against the front pocket. "Color preference?"

"Umm," He pauses, eyes narrowing in on the selection. "You pick."

"Again?" She asks, lips curling into a grin. He doesn't look offended by her quip, only a little awkward. El hums a tune below her breath to fill the silence, and she plucks a white rose from the bunch this time. It's practically perfect.

"Is that all?"

"Yes." He says, "Thanks."

She nods, rings him up for his single flower, and then he's out the door.

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### **On the third day, she gets curious.**

At first, she finds it a little odd that he's back for the third day in a row. But then she thinks — daydreams, really — that he's a romantic.

Maybe he just likes cherishing his girlfriend. Maybe he's just *that* in love.

(She's totally *not* jealous, she promises.)

She's just curious as to what kind of girl he's courting.

"Same old?"

He nods, brushing his hair from his face with a sweep of his hand. His finger thread through his black locks, eyes closing momentarily, and she's kind of *done for*.

She hadn't noticed his freckles before. Or his lips. Or his-

El clears her throat, forcing herself back down to Earth. "Pink?" She squeaks, coughing afterwards to conceal her hiccup.

"Whatever you think is best."

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### **On the fourth day, she develops a crush on him.**

He pulls on the flaps on his hoodie as he approaches her, and his elbows rest on the counter with ease; as though he's a regular in his favorite bar. "Hi."

He's definitely shaken off his nerves.

El smiles, and she pulls a single red rose out from behind her back. She'd seen him approaching from outside and decided to prepare his order before he could even walk through the door.

She feels a soft blush rise to her cheeks when he just continues to stare at her, the lone flower between her fingers. El swallows a deep breath, ducking her gaze, "I hope she's keeping them watered."

"Oh," he gapes across at her, unflinching as his lips form a smile, "Umm, yeah. They're well watered." His nose crinkles, and he blinks twice. "Obviously."

El nods, and she places the rose down on the counter to wrap its stem. "Great." She mumbles.

"You know, you're kind of like my own personal florist at this point."

With a look up at him, the young woman's hands stop pressing numbers into the till, her fingers curling mid-air. "I guess I am." She shrugs one shoulder, feeling like the halter-strap of her apron is

pulled too tight, cutting off her airway. "I'll see you tomorrow?"

"Yeah." He says, maybe a little too quickly. "Definitely." He smiles, wide and bright, and El has to literally steady her grip on the machine.

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### **On the fifth day, she learns his name.**

"I work across the street."

"I know." El tells him, nodding her understanding, "I saw you locking up yesterday."

"Right," he says. Then, "I'm Mike, by the way." He sticks out his hand, politely smiling down at her.

She hadn't noticed his height before. (Oh.)

"El." The brunette tells him, and she tentatively reaches out to shake his hand. His fingers wrap around the back of her hand for maybe a second longer than she thinks they should, and their handshake is way too friendly, touchy.

She runs the pad of her thumb along the skin between his wrist and palm, eyeing his watch.

"I thought your name was Jane." He says, and his gaze lands on her chest, eyeing her name tag with curiosity.

El retracts her hand then, and she shoves them both into the big pocket on the front of her apron, wincing as her knuckles catch on a previously cut thorn. "It's a nickname, El. My dad-"

"Right." Mike cuts her off, not meaning to pry. He gnaws at the inside of his cheeks then, and his eyes lift off the stitched tag on her apron. "El."

Unable to help the blush rising to her cheeks, El silently scolds herself by turning around and pinching her forearm. "Single rose?"

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## **On the sixth day, she grows jealous.**

"She's a lucky girl."

"Who is?" He asks her, and suddenly El is *confused*.

"Your girlfriend." She says, brows furrowing and dipping, "Or the girl you're trying to date."

Mike just nods, and she's definitely not ignorant to the way his cheeks go all pink, "I guess."

(It's not like she wants to be jealous of someone she's never meant. But she is, and there's nothing she can do about it.)

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## **On the seventh day, she starts daydreaming.**

She never meant for it to happen. But he came in with his stupid Christmas sweater, hair disheveled, eyes sleepy, and he just looked so... well-

"You may very well be my favorite person on Earth."

She'd gone cold at that, back suddenly stiff and lips parting in surprise.

"I don't think your girlfriend would like you saying that." She batted her eyelashes up at him, suggestively flirty despite her knowing better.

"Would you?"

"If my boyfriend flirted with the girl selling him flowers? No. No, I wouldn't like it."

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

"No." She wanted to say *never*, not ever, but she refrained. "Why?"

"No reason." He smiled, almost grinned. El frowned.

"If you say so." She handed him a red rose, freshly picked and bright

and bold. "If you say so. "Thanks."

(She hadn't meant for it to happen, but as soon as he'd left, she closed the store for the day and went for a lie down in the back room.)

(Her experiences with the opposite sex are next to none, and she gets easily flustered if she thinks about *that*. And so, naturally, she thought about it.)

(She thought about the very cute, very not-single guy who works across the street, who comes into her store every single day to buy his girlfriend single roses.)

(And then she imagined him handing *her* a rose instead of the other way around, and she lost her damn mind.)

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### **On the eighth day, she doesn't come into work.**

With ninety perfect certainty he'd stop by that afternoon, she'd opted to take a day off. Kali was cool with it, and she didn't ask questions. If she had, El's pretty sure she would have died of embarrassment.

So, she'd spent all day in bed, feigning illness and dealing with the fact that she's kind of, totally, almost definitely falling for someone she can never have.

And then Kali came home, told her some guy named Mike asked about her and bought a single red rose to add to his collection.

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### **On the ninth day, she confronts him.**

She goes to work with one clear goal in mind: quit

"I had a dream about you last night." She tells him, earnest.

"You did?" He asks, almost in a whisper. She nods, swallowing. Mike lets her words sink in before he continues, saying, "What kind of dream?"

There's an elderly lady in the back of the store eyeing up some

daffodils, and El lowers her voice, leaning closer. "That kind."

"Oh."

"So you need to stop coming in here." She tells him then, "You need to find a different florist because I'm not good at this whole crush thing."

(Well, there goes nothing.)

"You have a crush on me?" Mike squeaks, and he runs his fingers through his hair again, pulling on the strands.

"Yes." El sighs, brushing her own hair behind her ears. "I can't be your florist anymore."

He just nods at that, seemingly unfazed despite his burning brown stare. "Can you be my florist one last time?"

Tossing her head back in aggravation, El turns around to pluck another red rose from the selection. She holds the stem carefully between her fingertips, eyes closing.

He's still going to be across the street every day. He's still going to be within at least thirty feet of her every day.

She rings him up, avoiding his gaze.

"For your girlfriend's sake."

Mike just picks up the final rose from the counter once he's paid her. He leans over so his lips are close to her ear, and he mumbles,

"I don't have a girlfriend."

And then he's gone.

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**On the tenth day, it's Valentine's Day.**

He doesn't come into the store all day.

It's a holiday for romantics, so business is thriving all morning, and

deep into the afternoon. Old men come into to buy their wives special-made arrangements. Office workers come in, don't even look up from their iPhones, and they order the most basic of festive bouquets.

With Kali there to help, El almost makes it through the day emotionally unscathed. She doesn't think about love, and she doesn't think about her crush, or him. She's too busy for most of the day.

But then it's seven o'clock in the evening, the sun's gone down, and Kali's off partying with her friends... and she remembers.

And, okay, even if he didn't *already* have a girlfriend, he was definitely buying those roses for a prospective girlfriend or someone. It'd be a little strange for a guy to just do what he did if he wasn't planning some kind of grand romantic gesture.

So, he's probably off on a date right now. The tech store across the way is already closed, she notes with a quick look out the front window. The shutters are down, and El sighs.

It's not unusual for her, to have plans of spending the lovers' holiday curled up on the couch with a book and her favorite fuzzy socks. She's never been asked out on Valentine's, so why should she expect this year to go any differently?

Eyeing the remaining flowers left behind after the Valentine's raid, he spots a single red rose left. Plucking the crimson flower from the metal vase, she twists it around between her thumb and forefinger considerably.

What harm would it do if she took it home, pretended it was a gift from a secret admirer, and threw herself a small pity party? None, really.

Checking the till a final time, El quickly throws her jacket on before making her way over to the front of the store. She flips the sign over, swapping 'open' for 'closed', and she pulls the door open and closed behind her.

The air's cool out, a touch warmer than it had been in the morning.

The sky's a darkening shade of blue, a sign of nightfall setting in. She can already hear the rustle of party-goers coming from down the street, cheering and whooping as champagne bottles pop. (She's pretty sure Kali's doing her party trick.)

El shoves her keys back into her pocket then, having locked up the shop for the night. She tucks her hair behind her ears, soft curls tucking into the collar of her denim jacket as she juggles her purse and the lone rose she's holding.

"Hi."

Whipping around, El comes face to face with the last person she'd expected to see.

"Mike." She takes a deep breath, almost tempted to hide the flower behind her back out of embarrassment. "What are you doing here?"

She takes note of his stance, of his outfit. There's no sweater and no hoodie. And he's wearing a shirt with his jeans, tie and all. His hair is neat, his eyes bright. His hands are behind his back, and he rolls back on the heels of his shoes.

"Do you have plans?" He clears his throat, swallowing sharply, "Like, right now?"

"It's Valentine's." She tells him with a pointed look.

"Yeah, but..."

"Shouldn't you be with your girlfriend?"

"I told you," He smiles, corners of his mouth drawing up into a wide grin, "I don't have one." His eyes drift down to her lips then, "Yet."

El folds her arms over her chest, sleeves of her oversized jacket balling up around her wrists. Her nostrils flare in confusion, and she takes him in. "Then who were all those flowers for?"

Mike doesn't answer her question, but he pulls his hands out from behind his back — a messily wrapped bunch of roses in his left hand.

There are ten of them, in a triad of colors. Some of the flowers are dying, wilting. But the majority are still fresh, colorful and beautiful.

"Umm, I really hope roses are your favorite," he whispers, gaze lowering to the bouquet wrapped in string, "or this was all for nothing."

"You-"

"Yeah."

"For me?"

"For you." He smiles.

Unable to hold back any longer, El lunges forward. She throws her arms around him, leaping into his arms and almost crushing the flowers between them. Her own rose drops to the floor as she clasps her hands behind his neck, legs circling around his waist.

(Okay, so she's never even kissed him and this is *kind of* awkward. But he just-)

"You wanna be my Valentine?"

Instead of replying, El just cups the left side of his face in her right hand, and she raises her face from the crook of his neck to press her lips against his. She feels his free hand rest against her lower back, holding her upright as she claws at the back of his neck, fingertips slipping into his hair.

"I'd love to." She mumbles into the kiss.

Mike smiles, and he pulls away momentarily to eye the flower on the wet concrete. "Did you really give yourself a rose?"

"Maybe."